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ABSTRACT

Enthusiasm for and a commitment to literature are the essential tools needed to successfully promote the enriching, challenging, and thought-provoking world of books. This paper focuses on the promotion of literature inside the classroom, inside the library, and in the wider community. Programs at Methodist Ladies' College (Australia), a boarding and day school for grades kindergarten to year 13, include (1) student literature clubs; (2) staff book clubs; (3) "Literature for Life," an elective course that teaches year 9 and year 10 students about the world of literature and books and develops them as readers, rather than focusing on a set text and reader response; (4) "Reading for Pleasure" classes, seminars in which the teacher-librarian introduces 10-15 new high-interest titles, giving a brief review of each, and then allowing students to select and borrow the book they want to read; (5) involvement of the teacher-librarian with the English curriculum through specialized literature-related program topics such as book of the year, illustration, publishing, folk tales, and author study; and (6) activities conducted by the Methodist Ladies' College library for the students, school community, parents, and wider community. (SWC)

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Libraries Alive
Promoting Libraries and Literature - Practical Applications for the Teacher-Librarian.

by Suzette Boyd
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Methodist Ladies' College isa a boarding and day school of over 2400 students from kindergarten to Year 13. There is a staff of three hundred including one hundred eighty teachers.

For the purposes of this paper, I have assumed that as librarians and teachers we all love reading and that we want to involve our students in the enriching, challenging and thought-provoking world of books. An important factor in achieving our aims is that we have a captive audience of staff and students. Negative factors may be staffing and budgetary con-straints. The latter is often perceived as a hurdle to program initiatives.

During this paper I hope to demonstrate that enthusiasm for and a commitment to literature are the essential tools needed to successfully promote our **product**. It doesn't matter how "well read" and knowledgeable we are about the world of books, without loads of enthusiasm and commitment it can be a difficult task to harness interest and excitement in students and sell reading to them. Reading, not just as a classroom activity, **but** as an interest and pleasure that will last a lifetime. The aim of this seminar is to inspire participants to inject renewed enthusiasm into the promotion of literature in their colleges and libraries.

I will focus on the promotion of literature inside the classroom, inside the library and in the wider community. My aim has always been to work towards the recognition of my college as a literary school. All of the initiatives outlined today will contribute to that aim becoming a reality.

Student Literature Clubs

One of the most successful vehicles for promoting libraries and literature is the formation of co-curricula Student Literature Clubs. It is important to establish aims and rationale early in the establishment process, so that impetus and early excitement is not lost. I have established literature clubs in my last three colleges and have been responsible for the establishment of similar clubs throughout my home state of Victoria and Australia.

Aims

* To enable staff and students to share in the discovery of new books.
* To encourage students to be interested in books and reading for pleasure, not just something they have to do for school.
* To provide an opportunity for student initiatives e.g. arranging for guest speakers, participating in book buying, speaking at school assemblies, developing goals.
* To enable students aged from 12-18 to meet in a non-threatening, stimulating environment by coming together because of their love of reading.

Once the aims are established, an advertising blitz has been undertaken and there is a core of interested members, we come together to decide on the logistics of meetings and the type of activities to be offered. It has been crucial to the success of these clubs to have clearly established goals and agendas. Lunchtime meetings, for instance,can be over without any sense of achievement or fulfillment.

Activities

Some of the wonderful activities possible are "Book of the Year " committees, literature camps, author visits, performance of picture books in local primary schools, Book Week dinners, excursions to plays, collaborating with an illustrator to create a mural for the library, buying original art work from children's' books and writing articles and reviews for local papers. This list is not an exhaustive list; the possibilities are limited only by one's imagination.

The importance of publicity.

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If the types of activities listed above are promoted not only within your college community but also in the wider education and local community, all sorts of opportunities may come your way . I have had requests from publishers wanting feed-back from young readers about a manuscript they're considering and from a company producing a video on author Robin Klein wanting student input. If your college is known as a literary institution and your students are known as readers and you are known as an energetic, enthusiastic teacher-librarian all these adventures can and do happen for you, your students, your library and your college.

The literature Club will become an integral part of the library's operation will be an effective vehicle through which to promote literature and reading to the rest of the college and the wider community. With keen readers being given the opportunity for positive input and contact with the library, an increase in discriminating borrowing and discussion of books will occur.

Staff Book Club

The library aims to promote literature and reading to all its users--staff and students. Establishing a Staff Book Club is a positive and effective way to give teachers the opportunity to learn more about publishing for young people. So often teachers only read what is on the curriculum or the books they are teaching this year, which might well be the same titles they taught the year before and the year before that as well. Coming together to explore and discuss new adolescent titles and authors in a social situation and over a meal is a great way to forge strong links with classroom teaches. Not only English teachers, but **all** teachers should be targeted as possible members of a staff book group. It is in the interest of all of us to know what our students and children are reading. The clubs I've established have had a strong social focus. We have had evenings when we have met in a member's home, over a meal which we have all helped to prepare.

Organization of the club

* A wide selection of new books must be available for members to borrow.

* A reminder of the forthcoming meeting, with address, location map and time is given to each member one week before the next meeting.

* Each member brings their culinary contribution, the book they have read and their review (on a system card) to the meeting.

* During the course of the evening (usually 7:00p.m. - 10:00p.m.), each member reviews the book(s) they have read and makes recommendations ,for example, as to a book's suitability for class study or class set purchase .

The decision to include written reviews may be regarded negatively in these times of heavy teacher workloads. However, these re-views have been one of the most successful aspects of the organization, resulting in the annual publication of the pamphlet, "Best Books for Young People," thousands of which have been sold throughout Australia.

The establishment of Staff Book Clubs is an acknowledgment of "teachers as learners". The Teacher-Librarian is not only the facili-tator, but an initiator with skills and expertise, enabling all staff to be learning for the future and to participate together in the promotion of literature.

Feedback from teachers

Some of the many comments I have received over the years include:

" Reviews of books often lead on to the discussion of other issues...and concerns about individual students."

" ....as we have different reading tastes we are becoming familiar with a wide range of books".

" .....social get-together of staff who don't usually mix at school".

" I have found a range of books suitable for reluctant readers in my class".

" I now have more confidence in recommending a variety of books to classes."

" It's exciting to be offered twenty or so new titles every month".

Literature for Life

I am convinced that there is a need and a demand for students to be offered specialized literature studies as part of the education curriculum. Studies that teach them about the world of literature and books and develop them as readers, rather than studies that focus on a set text and reader response. I will outline an elective course that I have taught to both Year 9 and Year 10 students(ages 14 -16). The course runs for a full year.

Aims

* To foster reading for pleasure as an interest that can be carried on beyond college.

* To develop in students the skills when reading, to form values and ideas.

* To expose students to a wide range of literature.

I encourage students to read aloud in class so that they can fully appreciate the power of the written word and become confident in their use and appreciation of language. I encourage them to read beyond their present level and to learn to discriminate between " pulp" and quality literature. We work together on improving their listening and oral skills. Students are introduced to the works of a wide range of authors and illustrators.

Focus

Student and teacher participation and involvement are closely aligned throughout the course. We come together to share our interest in literature. The teacher should be a guide and facilitator reflecting a wider experience of the world of literature than the students. The students must be open to questions, suggestions and new directions. They don't know what to expect from the course. Their lack of preconceptions is probably one of the advantages of offering such a course of study. All minds are open to new experiences and can grow together. However, some guidance must be presented to the students as to possible areas of exploration.

Topics

1. Sharing the experience of reading
2. The skill of reading aloud and its effect on the listeners.
3. What is a "good" book?
4. The development of the technique of selecting a "good" book.
5. Looking at literature from childhood.
6. Analyzing and appreciating the experiences we all bring to reading.
7. The significance of reading for enjoyment.
8. Publishing - who decides what we'll read?
9. Marketing techniques and strategies of publishers.

One of the privileges for me as a teacher-librarian has been the chance to teach literature studies to students in the crucial middle years of schooling. I have become familiar with new stories and new authors from our discussions and have made friendships with students that are often not possible in more mainstream studies. Seeing these young people develop a commitment to reading and grow in their love and knowledge of literature has been enlightening for me as an "old hand" at bringing books and young people together.

"Reading for Pleasure" Classes

I conduct these classes as part of the English curriculum, but very much as a teacher-librarian and a literature specialist. They are effective at reaching large numbers of students across the college. Sessions take place in the reading area of the library, and are offered to all English classes from Years 7 - 11.

Format

In these classes I present 10-15 new high interest titles (not always fiction) and introduce the characters, discuss the plot and how I reacted to the book personally and what other student's reactions have been (always favorable of course). Lots of enthusiasm is demonstrated and I never introduce books that I have not personally read. It is not my aim to discuss in detail the literary merits of each book, but rather to encourage the students to read them. I also allow 10-15 minutes at the end of a 50 minute period in which to read a short story, a picture book, or I may read a chapter from one of the books I introduced. This segment seems to be a favorite with both the teachers and the students. I always make sure that I have multiple copies of the titles being introduced, as there is usually an immediate rush on them. If some students have to reserve a title or wait too long they won't return...this is the big opportunity to promote reading, so multiple copies are a must.

Benefits

The students have a contact in the library in whom they have confidence as a readers' adviser.

The students are much more involved and interested in the fiction collection and new titles.

The students will come and seek information and advice regularly and are more likely to suggest titles that I should read.

Enjoyment from hearing a teacher give book reports.

The teachers are delighted to offer their students the variety of a specialist teacher.

These benefits take time to achieve, but

commitment and enthusiasm will eventually be rewarded with success and respect.

Literature as Part of the English Curriculum

As cooperative planning and teaching is an integral part of the education services of most libraries now, there are opportunities aplenty as a teacher-librarian to become involved in the English curriculum. Specialist enrichment units I have been involved in team-teaching have included:

* Book of the Year - areas focussed on include the short-listed titles for that year, inviting a judge from our state to talk to our students,and looking at past winners of awards.

* Illustration - areas focussed on include, looking at the development of picture books through the years, a visit to an Illustrators' gallery, and workshops with illustrators.

* Publishing - after visiting Penguin Books and hearing many speakers there, students published their own books.

* Folk Tales - areas focussed on included re-writing traditional folk tales, dramatizing and reading aloud.

* Author Study - visiting authors who spoke to my students were interviewed, were researched and then profiled for publication in school papers and magazines.

At Methodist Ladies' College

So far I have concentrated on fairly structured programs that promote the library through literature. Most of the above programs involve the teacher -librarians.

At Methodist Ladies' College in Melbourne, Australia, where I am the Director of Library services I have established a management structure that ensures all staff in the library are involved in promoting their own area of responsibility. We are divided into five teams and a management team. All five groups have a team leader who is also a member of the management team. The teams are Reader Services, Education Services, Collection Management, Technology/Media Services and Marketing. There would not be one member of the staff of ten who is not at some time bringing literature and students together.

Activites For Students

* Reading Lists - updated and on display, given to class teachers.
* Student Networkers - a group of students who work in the library on displays, and lunchtime promotions.
* Displays - author profiles, Literature and Poetry Club information, Best Books, reviews, Best-seller Lists, themes and news items.
* Suggestion Book - very popular with the students. (Suggestions must be acted on promptly)

Activities for the School Community

* A Library Expo - displays, speakers, performers.
* MLC READS! - to celebrate the Library Expo and the importance of reading the whole school of 2500 came together for 50 minutes for a period of private reading. To signal the end of the reading period a Tiger Moth aeroplane circled the school towing a banner which said MLC READS! All fully sponsored by one of our suppliers.

Activities for Parents

* Friends of the Library - an interest and support group that assists with end-processing of books, organizes information evenings and talks for parents.

* Literary Evenings - special evenings once a term promoting recent literature.

* Weekly column in the Principal's Newsletter - news and reviews, services and future directions.

Activities for the Wider Community

* Links with publishers - bringing students and literature together at the beginning of the process.
* Visitors Days(once a term) - where other educators visit our library to discuss our innovative programs.

I cannot stress enough the importance of marketing. It's no use having a good knowledge of children's' literature if you don't share it, nor is the library going to be "alive" if you don't market it and encourage others to take advantage of all it has to offer. If you're doing something new or exciting tell the staff at general staff meetings and tell the whole school at assemblies. Write reports for the school

newsletters, contact the print and electronic media, send information out on Bulletin Boards, use E-Mail and write articles for your professional journals. We all benefit by hearing of exciting or effective ways of marketing and promoting our product.

If the school library program is seen as being innovative, effective, risk-taking, entrepreneurial and responsive to user needs, funding and staffing cease to become hurdles.